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New Team in Town

Transfer of power begins as Reagan's emissaries descend on Washington

The man of the hour and his wife attended services at the Bel Air Presbyterian Church and then went into seclusion. The President-elect spent the week riding, chopping wood and relaxing with Nancy on their California ranch. But from midweek on, Ronald Reagan's emissaries streamed into Washington, packing the "red-eye" overnight flights from the West Coast. Said one adviser: "A lot of tired people are trying to get things going." They faced one of the most intricate tasks in democratic government: arranging a transfer of power from a defeated Administration to an incoming regime vastly different in philosophy, policies and, of course, personnel.

The mood could not have been more businesslike. The advance guard of as many as 500 Reaganites who were soon to be working on the transition checked into nine floors of a drab eleven-story M Street office building, where it found rooms sparsely furnished with gray metal desks. Doors bore hand-lettered signs identifying the functions of the people who would be occupying the offices (congressional liaison, agricultural task force) but not yet their names. In the seventh-floor mail room, nine volunteers sorted sacks of letters addressed to Reagan into 100-odd cubbyholes. The largest box, for résumés and job requests, filled up so quickly that two more had to be added. Within minutes, they were overflowing too.

The boss of the transition teams, Edwin Meese III, arrived Wednesday morning—personable, affable, cheery. A few hours later he herded 30 or so staffers to the White House for a meeting with their opposite numbers in the Carter Administration. The standing-room-only crowd jammed a small auditorium usually used by the First Family to watch movies. Said one participant: "There was a smattering of rookie winners and losers, the type who muttered snide comments and made noticeable grimaces." But the top men urged harmony. White House Chief of Staff Jack Watson, who is overseeing the transition from the Carter side, opened with gallows humor: "Now we're going to have the exchange of prisoners." But he soon turned serious, telling the Carter people:

"This is not a time for political debate. Continuity is the watchword."

So began a transition that will pick up its pace this week, when the President-elect comes down from the Santa Ynez Mountains. Reagan was scheduled to fly to Washington Monday for the first of three weeklong visits before his Inauguration. At a CIA briefing he will tell Director Stansfield Turner that he will be replaced. On Thursday, Reagan will visit with the man he defeated so resoundingly Nov. 4. While their husbands confer, Rosalynn Carter will show Nancy Reagan around the White House living quarters.

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